

# Ruskin College Oxford



## Archaeological Watching Brief Report



November 2008

**Client: West Waddy ADP**

Issue No: 1

OA Job No: 4252

NGR: SP 543 078



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# Geotechnical Investigations, Ruskin College, Oxford

## *ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT*

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## SUMMARY

*In October 2008, Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief during geotechnical test pitting at Ruskin College, Oxford (NGR: SP 543 078). The work was commissioned by West Waddy ADP in advance of proposed construction of new buildings and associated access roads to the east and north of the existing college buildings. The watching brief revealed details of the construction of the main college buildings and deposits of made ground associated with landscaping of the college grounds. No other significant archaeology was observed.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 In October 2008 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Ruskin College, Oxford (NGR: SP 543 078). The work was commissioned by West Waddy ADP, in respect of a proposal to construct new buildings and associated access roads to the east and north of the existing college buildings.

1.1.2 A project brief was agreed with the City Archaeologist, David Radford, requiring that an archaeologist be present during the excavation of the geotechnical test pits and the proof holes prior to drilling.

### 1.2 Location, geology and topography

1.2.1 The college buildings and surrounding gardens are situated to the north of Old Headington, on the northern edge of the Oxford suburban spread, located on Dunstan Road and Stoke Place and lying approximately 102 m above OD. The A40 North Way bypass cuts across the fields to the north of the development areas.

1.2.2 Headington is drained on the north by the Bayswater Brook that rises on the eastern slopes of Shotover Hill and flows west to join the Cherwell near New Marston. The valley floor is based on Oxford Clay with land rising fairly sharply up to the top of the plateau formed by the Corallian beds, generally *c* 90 m above sea level.

1.2.3 The detailed local geology shown on the published British Geological Survey map, Sheet 237, shows the Site on an area of mixed geology. The college buildings are located on the Corallian beds at the top of the slope, in particular on part of the formation known as Beckley Sand Member which is made up of sand and calcareous sandstone. To the north, progressing down the valley side, are thin bands of Temple Cowley Member - fine grained sandstones, sands and siltstones and West Walton Formation - a dark grey silty mudstone, running east west parallel with the Brook. The fields to the north of the bypass are located on Upper Oxford Clay and the footpath known as Stoke Place to the east of the Site is over an area of Head drift geology. The Bayswater Brook has a valley bottom of alluvial deposits (BSG 1994).

There are a number of springs in the area draining into the Brook and presumably located along the junctions of differing geology.

### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

#### *Summary*

- 1.3.1 The archaeological background to the watching brief was prepared at the beginning of the project using the brief and Desk Based Assessment (DBA) prepared prior to an archaeological evaluation conducted on the site in 2008. The DBA should be consulted for further detail (OA, 2006).

#### *Prehistoric*

- 1.3.2 Evidence for prehistoric activity in the surrounding area is fairly limited although archaeological excavations at the nearby former football stadium, Manor Ground, did yield a struck flint assemblage from which the earliest material dates to the Mesolithic or early Neolithic period (JMHS 2003). The bulk of the flint assemblage comprised artefacts from the later Neolithic and Bronze Age accompanied by pottery of a similar date. Also at this site the quantity of middle-late Iron Age pottery present suggests that a contemporary settlement may be located within the immediate vicinity.

#### *Romano-British Period (AD 50-450)*

- 1.3.3 There is extensive evidence for Romano-British activity within the Headington area and it is clear that a major pottery industry was flourishing in the wider area during this period. Numerous kilns sites have been found in the vicinity of the north-south Roman Road which ran just to the east of Headington between Alchester and Dorchester.
- 1.3.4 There has been speculation regarding the presence of a kiln site at Ruskin Hall following artefactual discoveries during the construction of a block of residential accommodation completed between 1976-8. Landscaping work left exposed a quantity of Romano British pottery, mortaria, parchment ware, grey-ware, colour-coated and some coarse wares, mostly familiar Oxford types (SMR 3669). Prior to this 'Romano-British coarse pottery....was reported....from foundation trenches at the Rookery, Old Headington.' (Sturdy and Sutermeister 1966, 191).
- 1.3.5 In 1935 during house building on Cemetery Lane (now Dunstan Road) many potsherds, mostly mortaria of pinkish-white and buff clay and other kitchen vessels of coarse ware of the late 3rd and 4th centuries, were found (VCH 1939, 338). The suggested location of these finds is along the southern side of Dunstan Road opposite Ruskin College although the exact location was not recorded.

*Medieval and Post-medieval Period (450-present)*

- 1.3.6 Headington derives its name from a Saxon personal name 'Hedena' and 'dun' or hill and it is from the late Saxon period that the settlement derives its historical importance. Documentary evidence in the form of a charter of 1004 records King Ethelred confirming the details of a land endowment here at a royal manor. The manor is documented again within the Domesday records of 1086 when it was held by the King and it remained in the hands of the crown until after the death of Henry I (1135), after which the importance of Headington diminished in favour of Woodstock. The possible association of the area around Ethelred Court, just to the south of Ruskin College, with the location of a Royal Manor has been suggested since the 19th century although this remains unconfirmed despite previous archaeological investigations prior to new developments in 1988 and 1992 (OAU 1993).
- 1.3.7 Later medieval remains have been encountered at various locations in Old Headington and the medieval church of St Andrews attests to the continued existence of a settlement here throughout the period. The layout of the property boundaries also implies that buildings probably fronted the street arrangements with strip fields extending behind. Within this arrangement developed the 17th century hall-and-crosswing house, The Rookery. It is described as originating from a 16th century 'peasant dwelling' which may have ancillary domestic or agricultural activities around it within the grounds. A surviving walled kitchen garden with its 'crinkle-crankle' wall also dates from the 18th century.
- 1.3.8 The Rookery, its associated walled kitchen garden and Stoke House are Grade II listed buildings. Stoke House was built in 1883 as a preparatory school for boys by the Reverend John Williams Augustus Taylor, although this may have been modelled around an earlier 17th century cottage.

*Previous work on the Site*

- 1.3.9 An archaeological evaluation was undertaken on the Ruskin College site in 2008 by Oxford Archaeology. This took the form of a magnetometer survey followed by the excavation of 12 trial trenches to investigate the impact areas of the proposed development. The geophysical survey produced limited results although the trenches identified remains of early Iron Age, Roman and medieval/post-medieval date. The Roman remains were restricted to Trench 9 in the north-western part of the development area, although these are consistent with previous discoveries along the western fringe of the College grounds suggesting occupation along a raised finger of land. The Roman pottery assemblages recovered suggested the close proximity of a mortarium production site. Significant domestic charred cereal remains were recorded from an excavated Roman feature.



- 1.3.10 A cow burial dating to the 12th or 13th-century was encountered within the grounds of Stoke House, 100m south-east of the proposed development area during the evaluation (OA, 2008).

## 2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To preserve by record any archaeological deposits or features that may be disturbed or destroyed during the course of this phase of ground works.
- 2.1.3 To provide information to determine a mitigation strategy for the main phase of construction.
- 2.1.4 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

### 2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The watching brief was conducted as a continuous archaeological presence during the machine excavation of the test pits and a series of site visits during the hand excavation of the geotechnical pits adjacent to the buildings.
- 2.2.2 A plan showing the location of the test pits was maintained at a scale of 1:100 (Fig. 2) and the sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All excavations and any recorded sections were photographed using digital photography, colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was also made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Field Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 Description of deposits

#### *Test Pit 1*

- 3.1.1 This was originally located adjacent to the east wall of the main building, but was moved to the flower bed next to the south-east corner to avoid digging within a paved area (Fig. 2, Test pit 1; Fig. 3, Section 1).
- 3.1.2 Evidence of modern underpinning of the corner using concrete (14) was encountered at a depth of 0.9 m below the current ground level. This supported the south-east corner of the main building (13). Overlying these structures was a layer of gravel (12), which could be seen to be in excess of 1 m deep in section. This material is not found in the vicinity and probably represents imported material used to backfill the underpinning trench, possibly to aid drainage. This was sealed below a 0.18 m deep

layer of dark grey-brown clay silt (11), a layer of redeposited material, again a probable layer of backfill within the underpinning trench.

3.1.3 Overlying this was a 0.15 m deep layer of dark brown clay loam (10), containing numerous brick and stone fragments and which represents a modern landscaping layer.

3.1.4 The edge of the underpinning trench was not exposed within the test pit.

#### *Test Pit 4*

3.1.5 This was located against the west wall of the dining hall (Fig. 2, Test Pit 4; Fig. 3, Section 4).

3.1.6 A layer of natural yellowish orange-brown sandy clay (42) was encountered at a depth of 0.6 m below the current ground level. This was overlaid by a 0.35 m deep layer of grey-brown clay silt (41), which contained charcoal flecking and abraded brick fragments suggesting it was a layer of worked soil. This was cut by the foundation trench (44) containing the concrete footings for the dining hall (43).

3.1.7 Overlying the footings was a 0.2 m deep layer of dark brown clay loam (40), containing numerous brick and stone fragments and which represents a modern landscaping layer.

#### *Test Pit 5*

3.1.8 This was located against the east wall of one of the utility rooms to the rear of the main building (Fig. 2, Test Pit 5; Fig. 3, Section 5)

3.1.9 The underlying natural, a grey clay with many lenses of orange brown sand (52) was encountered at a depth of 0.3 m below the current courtyard level. This was overlaid by a 0.15 m deep layer of mixed grey-brown and yellow-brown silt clays (51). This contained numerous angular fragments of brick and stone and probably represents a layer of made ground. Cutting this deposit was the 0.55 m deep foundation trench (54), containing the foundation plinth for the south wall of the kitchen (53). A grey-brown clay silt deposit (55) was used to backfill the foundation trench.

3.1.10 Sealing the foundation trench and butting up to wall 53 was a 0.15 m deep layer of tarmac (50), the road and courtyard surface.

#### *Test Pit 6*

3.1.11 This was located against the north-west corner of one of the halls of residences, Bowen House (Fig. 2, Test Pit 6; Fig. 3, Section 6).

3.1.12 A layer of natural yellow-brown sandy clay (65) was encountered at a depth of 0.9 m below the current ground level. This was overlaid by a 0.3 m deep layer of light grey-brown clay silt (64), also a natural deposit. Overlying this was a 0.3 m deep layer of grey-brown clay silt (63), this contained charcoal flecking and abraded stone and may

represent an earlier layer of worked soil. A steeply sloping 0.8 m deep trench (66) had been cut through this layer, forming the construction cut for the modern concrete foundations (67). This had been backfilled with a grey-brown silt clay (62). Sealing the backfill was a 0.25 m deep layer of grey clay silt (61) containing numerous fragments of brick suggesting a probable construction layer.

- 3.1.13 A landscaping layer of topsoil and turf (60), 0.12 m deep, was laid directly over this layer.

#### *Test Pit 7*

- 3.1.14 This was located against the west wall of one of the halls of residences, Steve Biko House (Fig. 2, Test Pit 7; Fig. 3, Section 7).

- 3.1.15 A layer of natural orange-brown sandy clay (72) was encountered at a depth of 0.3 m below the current ground level. This was overlaid by a 0.2 m deep layer of light grey-brown clay silt (71), possibly a layer of colluvium. A steeply sloping 0.6 m deep trench (73) had been cut through this layer, forming the construction cut for the modern concrete foundations (75). This had been backfilled with a grey-brown silt clay (74). Sealing the backfill was a landscaping layer of topsoil and turf (70), 0.12 m deep.

#### *Test Pit 8*

- 3.1.16 This was located in the field to the north of the college buildings. The test pit was relocated approximately 25 m north-west from its original site (Fig. 2, Test Pit 8; Fig. 3, Section 8).

- 3.1.17 A layer of natural yellow-brown sandy clay (82) was encountered at a depth of 0.5 m below the current ground level. This was overlaid by a 0.3 m deep layer of dark grey-brown clay silt (81) containing abraded fragments of stone, a probable earlier ploughsoil horizon. Overlying this was a 0.25 m deep layer of dark brown silt loam (80), this contained charcoal flecking and abraded stone and may represent a later ploughsoil.

#### *Test Pit 10*

- 3.1.18 This was located 12 m east of the walled garden within an area of waste land (Fig. 2, Test Pit 10; Fig. 3, Section 10).

- 3.1.19 A layer of naturally occurring reddish brown peat (108) was encountered at a depth of 3 m below the current ground level. This deposit was very fibrous and contained preserved plant material. Overlying this was a 0.7 m deep layer of dark grey-brown clay silt (107), this contained charcoal flecking and a high concentration of ashy material and represents a layer of modern made ground. This was overlaid by a sequence of other layers of made ground, a 0.7 m deep layer of light grey sandy clay silt (106), a 0.7 m deep layer of dark grey-brown silt clay (105), containing many angular brick fragments and a 0.8 m deep layer of light yellow-brown silt clay (104),

containing angular stone and brick fragments as well as bottle glass. Overlying this was a 0.2 m deep layer of very light grey-brown clay silt (103). This contained large quantities of ash and clinker as well as modern finds such as fish paste jars and bed springs suggesting a layer of dumping. This was sealed by a 0.3 m deep layer of dark grey-brown clay silt (102), which also contained large quantities of ash and clinker. Overlying this deposit was a 0.4 m deep layer of light grey brown silt clay (101), also containing large quantities of ash and clinker. A 0.2 m deep layer of very dark grey clay silt (100), a layer of leaf mould and organic debris had accumulated over the last deposit.

### *Test Pit 11*

3.1.20 This was located on the northern edge of the field to the north of the college buildings (Fig. 2, Test Pit 11; Fig. 3, Section 11).

3.1.21 A layer of natural blue-grey clay (114), containing large shells, was encountered at a depth of 2.4 m below the current ground level. This was overlaid by a 0.85 m deep layer of orange-brown sandy clay silt (113) containing inclusions of blue-grey sandy clay. Overlying this was a 0.4 m deep layer of mottled blue-grey and yellow-brown sandy clay (112), the proportion of the blue-grey clay increasing with depth. Sealing this was a 0.85 m deep layer of mid brown clay silt (111), this contained charcoal flecking and reddish brown sand mottling and may represent a layer of colluvium. A 0.3 m deep layer of dark brown clay loam (110), the present day topsoil and turf, a probable layer of ploughsoil.

### *Test Pit 12*

3.1.22 This was located on the lawn to the south-west of the college buildings (Fig. 2, Test Pit 12; Fig. 3, Section 12).

3.1.23 A layer of natural pale yellow-brown sandy clay (124), was encountered at a depth of 1.9 m below the current ground level. This could be seen to be in excess of 1.2 m in depth in the section. This was overlaid by a 0.7 m deep layer of light yellow-brown sandy clay silt (123). Overlying this was a 0.65 m deep layer of yellow-brown sandy clay (122). Sealing this was a 0.35 m deep layer of grey-brown clay silt (121), this contained charcoal flecking fragments of brick and lenses of yellow-brown clay silt, mottling and probably represents a layer of made ground. A landscaping layer of dark brown clay loam (120), measuring 0.2 m deep had been deposited over the area.

## 3.2 **Finds**

3.2.1 No dating evidence other than modern finds were recovered during the course of the watching brief. The presence of these artefacts was recorded but they were not retained.

## 3.3 **Palaeo-environmental remains**

- 3.3.1 The layer of peat observed in Test Pit 10 was sealed immediately below 19th-century deposits and was considered too recent in origin to be worth sampling. No other deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were observed during the course of the watching brief.

#### 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 All the archaeologically significant deposits observed relate to the 19th-and 20th-century construction and activities of the college. This can be accounted for by both the limited area exposed and the proximity of the test pits to the standing buildings.
- 4.1.2 It is probable that the construction cut for these buildings (particularly the main building with the basement, and those modern buildings that have been terraced into the slope) has destroyed the archaeological potential for the areas immediately adjacent to the buildings.
- 4.1.3 Test Pit 10 appeared to be located over the centre of a valley which could be seen running down the slope in the field north of the walled garden. The continuous dampness within the valley would have been conducive to the formation of peat deposits. This valley appears to have been filled in during the 19th and earlier 20th-centuries.
- 4.1.4 The test pits in the field to the north of the college did not produce any deposits other than those associated with agricultural activity.
- 4.1.5 No evidence was observed showing that the Romano-British potteries located lower down the slope within the area of Bayswater Brook or those postulated from artefacts recovered during the construction of one of the halls of residence in 1976/8 continuing into the area of Ruskin College, either in the form of artefacts, structures or quarry pits.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
Test Pit 1						
10	Layer	0.15 m	-	Flower bed, modern landscaping deposit	-	C20th
11	Fill	0.18 m	-	Redposited material	Brick	C20th
12	Fill	> 1 m	-	Gravel backfill of underpinning trench	-	C20th
13	Structure	-	-	Stone wall, part of main college building	-	C18th/ 19th
14	Structure	0.6 m	> 0.6 m	Modern concrete underpinning of college building	-	C20th
Test Pit 4						
40	Layer	0.2 m	-	Landscaping layer	Brick	C20th
41	Layer	0.35 m	-	Made ground	Brick	C20th
42	Layer	> 0.3 m	-	Natural clay	-	-
43	Structure	0.6 m	> 1m	Concrete foundations for west wall of dining hall	-	C20th
44	Cut	0.6 m	> 1m	Foundation trench for west wall of dining hall	-	C20th
Test Pit 5						
50	Surface	0.15 m	> 3 m	Tarmac road and courtyard surface	-	C20th
51	Layer	0.15 m	-	Made ground	Brick	C20th
52	Layer	> 0.3 m	-	Natural clay	-	-
53	Structure	> 0.6 m	-	Foundation plinth	Brick	C19th
54	Cut	0.55 m	-	Construction cut	-	C19th
55	Fill	0.15 m	-	Backfill of construction cut	Brick	C19th
Test Pit 6						
60	Layer	0.12 m	-	Landscaping layer	Brick	C20th
61	Layer	0.25 m	-	Made ground	Brick	C20th
62	Fill	0.15 m	-	Backfill of construction cut	Brick	C20th
63	Layer	0.3 m	-	Earlier worked soil	-	-

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i> Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
Test Pit 6						
64	Layer	0.3 m	-	Natural clay	-	-
65	Layer	> 0.3 m	-	Natural clay	-	-
66	Cut	0.8 m	-	Foundation trench	-	C20th
67	Structure	0.8 m	-	Concrete raft foundations	-	C20th
Test Pit 7						
70	Layer	0.1 m	-	Landscaping layer	Brick	C20th
71	Layer	0.25 m	-	Natural clay	-	-
72	Layer	> 0.5 m	-	Natural clay	-	-
73	Cut	0.6 m	-	Foundation trench	-	C20th
74	Fill	0.2m	-	Backfill of construction cut	-	C20th
75	Structure	0.4 m	-	Concrete raft foundations	-	C20th
Test Pit 8						
80	Layer	0.25 m	-	Topsoil and turf, modern ploughsoil	-	C19th/ C20th
81	Layer	0.3 m	-	Earlier ploughsoil horizon	-	-
82	Layer	> 0.2 m	-	Natural clay	-	-
Test Pit 10						
100	Layer	0.2 m	-	Leaf mould	-	-
101	Layer	0.4 m	-	Made ground	Ash, metal	C19th
102	Layer	0.3 m	-	Made ground	Ash	C19th
103	Layer	0.2 m	-	Made ground	Glass, brick, metal	C19th
104	Layer	0.8 m	-	Made ground	Ash	C19th
105	Layer	0.7 m	-	Made ground	Ash	C19th
106	Layer	0.7 m	-	Made ground	Ash	C19th
107	Layer	0.7 m	-	Made ground	Ash	C19th
108	Layer	> 0.3 m	-	Peat	-	-

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i> Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
Test Pit 11						
110	Layer	0.3 m	-	Topsoil and turf, modern ploughsoil	-	C19th/ C20th
111	Layer	0.85 m	-	Probable layer of colluvium	-	-
112	Layer	0.4 m	-	Natural sandy clay	-	-
113	Layer	0.85 m	-	Natural clay	-	-
114	Layer	> 0.4 m	-	Natural clay	-	-
Test Pit 12						
120	Layer	0.2 m	-	Topsoil, modern landscaping	Brick, tile, plastic	C20th
121	Layer	0.35 m	-	Made ground/landscaping	Brick	C20th
122	Layer	0.65 m	-	Natural clay	-	-
123	Layer	0.7 m	-	Natural clay	-	-
124	Layer	> 1.2 m	-	Natural clay	-	-

## APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

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OA, 2006 *Ruskin College, Headington, Oxford: Desktop Assessment*

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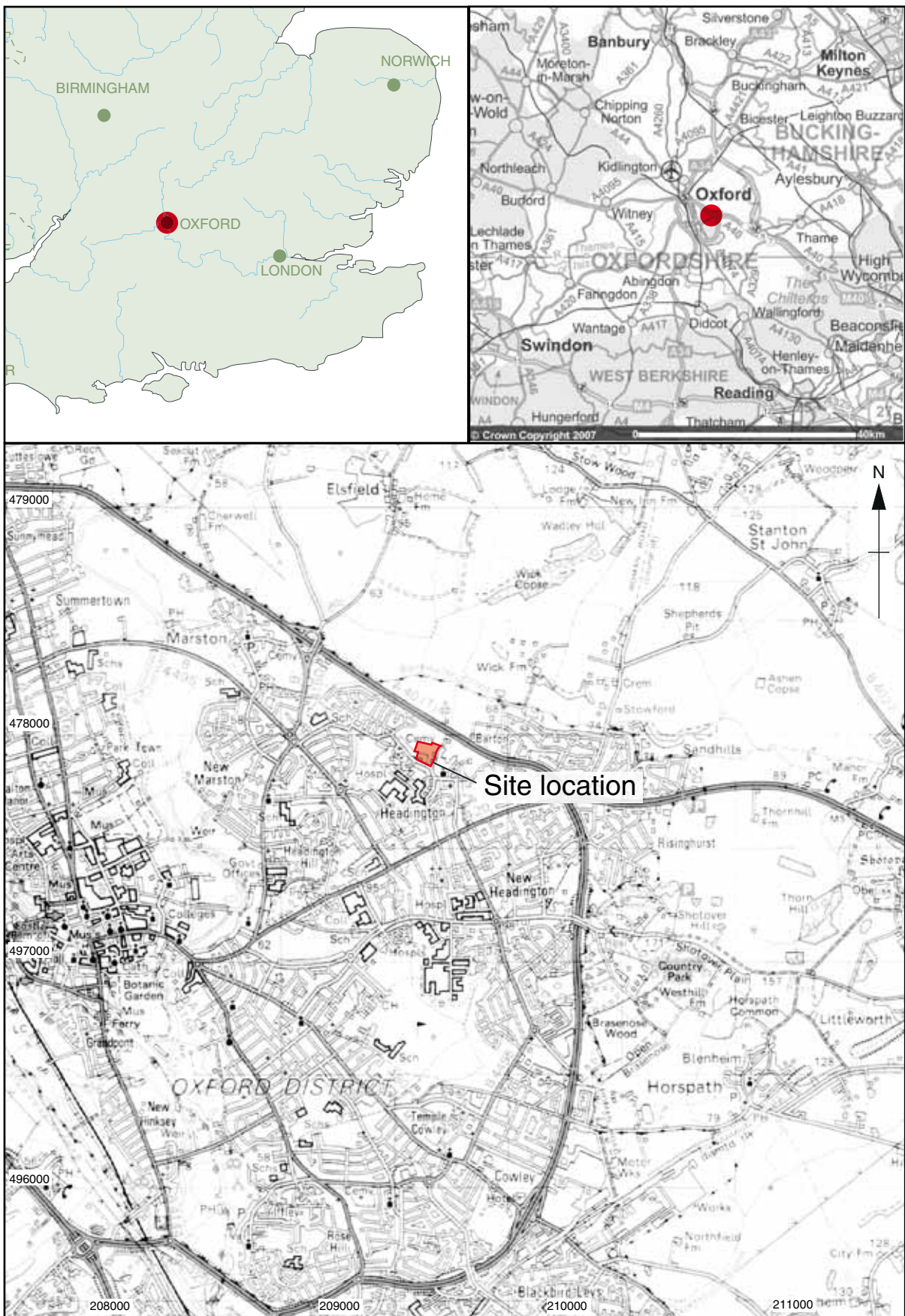
OA, 2008 *Ruskin College, Oxford: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

OAU, 1992 *Field Manual* (ed. D Wilkinson)



**APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS****Site name:** Ruskin College, Oxford, Oxfordshire**Site code:** OXSKIN 08**Grid reference:** SP 543 078**Type of watching brief:** Machine and hand excavation of 9 test pits.**Date and duration of project:** 27th and 28th October 2008, two days on site**Area of site:** c5,000 m<sup>2</sup>**Summary of results:** The watching brief observed deposits and structures relating to the 19th and 20th-century construction of the college and the landscaping of the grounds. No other significant archaeology was encountered.**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS:2008.38





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Figure 1: Site location



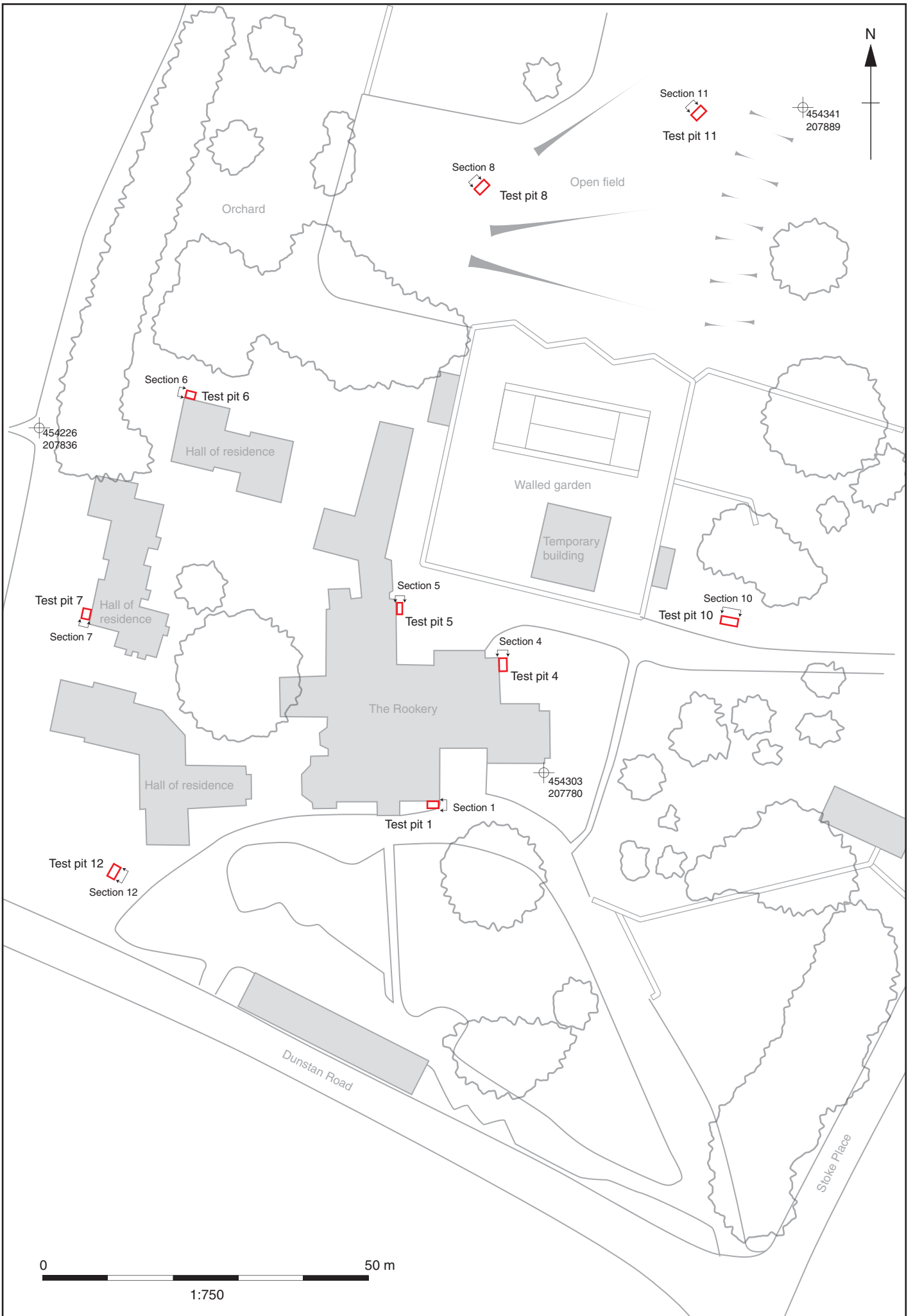


Figure 2: Site plan showing test pit locations



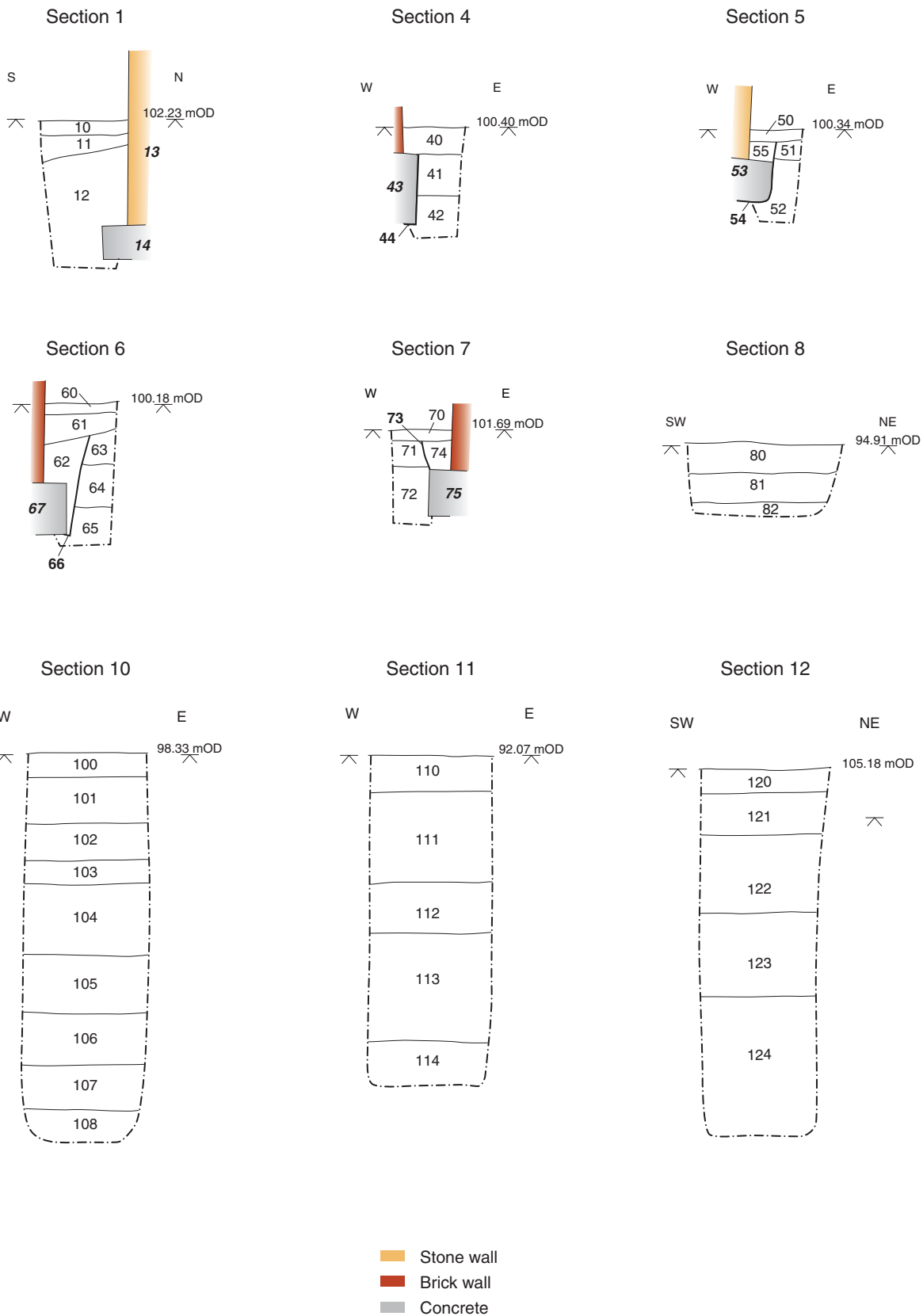


Figure 3: Sections



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